

INTEGRATED RECTIFYING ELEMENT

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to the forming in integrated form of a
5 rectifying element or rectifier.

Discussion of the Related Art

In the present description, an element performing a function identical to that of a bipolar diode, for example, used in D.C./D.C. converters of voltage step-down or step-up type, is designated as a rectifier.

10 Fig. 1 shows a conventional example of a D.C./D.C. voltage step-up converter 1 (CONV) supplying a load 2 (Q). Converter 1 provides a D.C. voltage V_{out} between terminals S and M of a storage capacitor 3 from a D.C. supply voltage V_{in} of lower level, applied between two input terminals E and M, terminal M forming, for example, a common ground with load 2. Load 2 is connected
15 between terminals S and M of capacitor 3. For example, load 2 is formed of two light-emitting diodes of a backlighted screen.

Converter 1 comprises, in series between terminals E and S, an inductance 4 and a rectifying element 5 (RECTIF). Rectifier 5 is oriented to enable flowing of a current from inductance 4 to capacitor 3. A controllable switch 6 is
20 connected between input terminal 7 of rectifier 5 and reference rail M. Generally, switch 6 is a MOS transistor having its control terminal formed by its gate receiving a pulse-width modulated signal PWM intended to regulate voltage V_{out} from either a reference voltage, or the load needs. The PWM signal, depending on the application, is provided by a control circuit not shown.

The rectifier is intended to act as a diode, that is, to block the reverse current when voltage V_{out} across the load becomes greater than the voltage across switch 6.

In the simplest applications, rectifier 5 is formed of a simple diode, generally of a Schottky diode. Such a Schottky diode has the disadvantage of being uneasily integrable.

Further, in many applications and especially in the case of a switched-mode application such as illustrated in Fig. 1, it is desired to be able to turn off the load supply circuit, either due to the presence of an electric problem therein (for example, a short-circuit), or for other reasons. Such a function of a rectifier element is generally designated as a true shutdown. Such a function especially enables, if switch 6 is off, preventing supply voltage V_{in} present between terminals E and M from recharging capacitor 3 while this is not desired. This especially enables performing a protection function by preventing overcurrents in case of a short-circuit on the load side (between terminals S and M).

To perform this function, a rectifier 5 formed of a diode D in series with a switch 8 is thus generally used, as illustrated in Fig. 1. Switch 8 is controlled by a circuit 9 (CTRL) receiving an enable signal EN from a control organ of the converter. Enable signal EN is used, for example, to interrupt the converter operation by the turning-off of switch 8 in case of a short-circuit in the load (detected by means not shown), in case of a problem on the side of the switched-mode power supply (PWM) control circuit, or more generally as soon as a turning-off of the converter is desired to be guaranteed. In practice, switch 8 is generally formed of a MOS transistor.

A disadvantage of rectifier 5 of Fig. 1 is the addition, in normal operation, of a voltage drop due to the on-state series resistance of switch 8 (R_{on} of the MOS transistor).

Another disadvantage is linked to the bulk of the high-voltage MOS transistor forming switch 8.

It has also been provided to form the rectifier in the form of a single MOS transistor by using its parasitic bulk-source diode. Such a solution requires
5 being able to control the bulk connection to ground to control the parasitic diode. When a circuit shutdown is desired, the polarities of the MOS transistor and of its bulk are reversed to reverse the polarity of its parasitic diode. Another disadvantage is that the actual transistor must be controlled at the frequency of the PWM signal. In normal operation, the transistor is controlled in reverse fashion
10 with respect to switch 6.

In addition to the difficulty linked to the need for controlling the transistor at the frequency of the PWM signal, the source of the transistor is floating, which poses problems of control reference of its gate signal. This generally results in using level-shifting circuits, which makes the circuit particularly
15 complex, especially for a high-voltage operation.

The series association of diode D with switch 8 could have been devised to be replaced by a thyristor. However, such a solution is incompatible with switched-mode power supplies. Indeed, a thyristor would require being controlled to be turned off each time switch 6 is off. Now, the frequencies of the
20 trains of width-modulated pulses are generally of several tens, or even hundreds of kilohertz, which is incompatible with switching rates currently available for thyristors.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention aims at providing a novel controllable rectifier
25 which has advantages over known solutions.

The present invention especially aims at providing a controllable resistor capable of isolating, at its turning-on, the elements that it separates.

The present invention also aims at providing a rectifier in which the series voltage drop in normal operation is minimized.

The present invention also aims at providing a solution compatible with an integration and which is of minimum bulk.

5 To achieve these and other objects, the present invention provides a controllable rectifying element, comprising a bipolar transistor having a current input terminal connected to a control terminal by a first switch and having a current output terminal connected to the control terminal by a second switch, the turn-off and turn-on phases of the first and second switches being complementary and
10 depending on the state desired for the rectifying element.

According to an embodiment of the present invention, the rectifying element further comprises a circuit for controlling the first and second switches according to the state of a signal for enabling/disabling the rectifying element.

According to an embodiment of the present invention, said switches
15 are formed of P-channel MOS transistors having their respective gates connected to the control terminal of the bipolar transistor via current sources.

According to an embodiment of the present invention, the control circuit comprises two N-channel MOS transistors connecting the respective gates of the P-channel MOS transistors to ground, said N-channel MOS transistors
20 being respectively controlled by the enable signal and by its inverse.

According to an embodiment of the present invention, said bipolar transistor is a PNP transistor.

According to an embodiment of the present invention, said bipolar transistor is an NPN transistor.

25 The present invention also provides a voltage converter of D.C./D.C. type comprising a rectifying element.

The foregoing objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will be discussed in detail in the following non-limiting description of specific embodiments in connection with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1, previously described, schematically and partially illustrates a D.C./D.C. converter of voltage step-up type comprising a known rectifying element;

5 Fig. 2 partially and schematically shows an embodiment of a voltage step-up converter comprising a controllable rectifying element according to the present invention; and

Fig. 3 partially and schematically shows a detailed embodiment of the rectifying element of Fig. 2.

10 DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Same elements have been designated with same reference numerals in the different drawings. For clarity, only those elements that are necessary to the understanding of the present invention have been shown in the drawings and will be described hereafter. In particular, the generation of the
15 different control signals has not been shown and is no object of the present invention. The present invention applies whatever the reason for which the rectifying element is desired to be made controllable. The generation of the enable/disable signal, be it based on a detection of a short-circuit in the load or of another malfunction, remains conventional.

20 Further, the present invention will be described hereafter in relation with an example of application to a D.C./D.C. converter of switched mode power supply type. It should however be noted that it more generally applies to the forming of a controllable rectifying element whatever the application.

Fig. 2 very schematically shows in a view to be compared with that of
25 previously-described Fig. 1 an embodiment of a D.C./D.C. converter 10 of switched-mode power supply type using a rectifier 15 specific to the present invention. As previously, the converter comprises two input terminals E and M between which is applied a voltage V_{in} and two output terminals S and M (terminal

M forming for example a common ground terminal) for providing a voltage V_{out} to a load 2 (Q). Converter 10 comprises, in series between terminals E and S, an inductance 4 and rectifying element 15, and between terminals S and M, a storage capacitor 3. A switch 6 controlled by a pulse-width modulation signal (PWM) of high frequency (generally several tens of kilohertz) connects an input terminal 7 of rectifying element 15 to ground M.

Converter 10 of Fig. 2 differs from that of Fig. 1 only by the structure of its rectifier 15.

According to this embodiment of the present invention, rectifier 15 is formed of a PNP-type bipolar transistor 18 having its emitter forming input terminal 7 of rectifier 15 and having its collector forming the output terminal connected to terminal S.

According to the present invention, the base of transistor 18 is connected to its emitter by a switch 11 and to its collector by a switch 12. Switches 11 and 12 are controlled by a circuit 19 (CTRL) receiving an enable signal EN of the rectifier. Signal EN originates, like for a conventional controllable rectifier, from an anomaly detection circuit (short-circuit or other) of the control circuit of switch 6 of the switched-mode power supply, etc.

The function of control circuit 19 is to control switches 11 and 12 by making sure, among others, that they are not simultaneously on.

In normal operation, switch 12 is on while switch 11 is off. Transistor 18 is thus diode-connected, which implies that it operates at the limit of the linear state. Thus, the voltage drop thereacross is minimum and is equivalent to that of a forward-biased bipolar diode (forward-biased base-emitter junction). In normal operation, switches 11 and 12 remain in this state (no switching) and the converter operates by control of switch 6.

When enable signal EN is switched to a low state indicative of a disabling of the circuit, control circuit 19 turns on switch 11 and turns off switch 12. Transistor 18 is then equivalent to its base-collector junction which, it being a PNP

transistor, is effectively reverse-biased if input voltage V_{in} is greater than voltage V_{out} across capacitor 3.

An advantage which already appears from the description of Fig. 2 is that the voltage drop of controllable rectifying element 15 in the on state is smaller
5 than that of conventional circuit 5. According to the present invention, the voltage drop of an on-state diode is reproduced.

Another advantage is that switches 11 and 12, although having to stand a high voltage between their terminals, only see the flowing of a very small current in the on state. Indeed, whatever the operating mode and due to the fact
10 that transistor 18 is not saturated, the current likely to run through switch 11 and 12 is, with respect to the current flowing between the emitter and collector of transistor 18, divided by the gain (β) of the transistor.

In practice, this results in permitting the surface area of each switch 11 and 12 to be small, in an integrated implementation, to approximately
15 correspond to the surface area required to form transistor 18, divided by the gain thereof.

Fig. 3 shows an embodiment of a control circuit 19 for controlling switches 11 and 12 of a rectifier 15 according to the present invention. In this example, switches 11 and 12 are formed of P-channel MOS transistors. The
20 respective gates of each transistor are connected to ground M by an N-channel MOS transistor, respectively, 21, 22, and base 23 of transistor 18 is connected to the gates of transistors 11 and 12 by current sources, respectively 24, 25. The respective gates of transistors 21 and 22 receive enable signal EN, via an inverter 26 for one of the transistors (for example, transistor 21). It is here assumed that
25 signal EN is active in the high state.

In normal operation, signal EN is thus high and imposes the turning-on of transistor 22 and the turning-off of transistor 21. Since transistor 22 is on, the gate of transistor 12 is pulled to ground, which turns it off and short-circuits terminals 23 and S. As for transistor 11, it remains off, its gate being in the air.

Upon switching of signal EN to the low state, transistor 21 turns on while transistor 22 turns off. In the absence of current source 25, the turning-off of the transistor would make the gate of transistor 12 floating. Current source 25 thus enables carrying the charges away therefrom to guarantee its turning-off.

5 Similarly, current source 24 is used to evacuate the charges from MOS transistor 11 upon turning-off of transistor 21 when signal EN switches high. Current sources 25 and 24 are formed, in the simplest fashion, of a resistor or, as an alternative, of any element performing this function, for example, MOS transistors adequately controlled by signal EN.

10 The embodiment of Fig. 3 uses P-channel MOS transistors for switches 11 and 12, which is preferable since this avoids use of a level shifter to control an N-channel MOS transistor.

An advantage of the present invention is that the integration surface necessary to form rectifier 15 is considerably reduced as compared to the
15 conventionally formed rectifier. In particular, in a technology where MOS transistors are formed vertically, P-channel MOS transistors 11 and 12, which must stand the high voltage but only need letting through a small current, take up a small surface area (proportional to the current that they must stand).

Another advantage is that the rectifying element is easily integrable,
20 if need be with its control circuit.

Another advantage, induced by the circuit of the present invention and the use of a bipolar transistor, is that the current flowing through the rectifying element is automatically limited. Indeed, the base current of bipolar transistor 18 is a function of the current between its emitter and its collector, and thus of the
25 current in inductance 4. Accordingly, a variation of the current in inductance 4 translates as a variation in the operating point of transistor 18.

Of course, the present invention is likely to have various alterations, modifications, and improvement which will readily occur to those skilled in the art. In particular, it has been assumed hereabove that transistor 18 is a PNP-type

transistor. It may however be an NPN-type transistor. The modification of the connections to enable use of an NPN-type transistor is within the abilities of those skilled in the art based on the above functional description. In particular, switches 11 and 12 are then adapted to enable injection of a base current in normal
5 operation.

Further, although the present invention has been described in relation with an application to a voltage step-up converter, it also applies to voltage step-down converters and, more generally, as soon as a controllable rectifying element is desired to be used.

10 Such alterations, modifications, and improvements are intended to be part of this disclosure, and are intended to be within the spirit and the scope of the present invention. Accordingly, the foregoing description is by way of example only and is not intended to be limiting. The present invention is limited only as defined in the following claims and the equivalents thereto.

15 What is claimed is: